

CAVALCADE OF COUNTIES:

HOUSE DIVIDED

**Once a Part of Essex, Union Is Jersey's Youngest
County, Its Second Smallest and Third Industrially**

BY JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM



The Union County Court House, a 17-story structure on Broad street in Elizabeth, commands view of almost all Union County.

ALL the national talk about secession in the 1850s found understanding along the Elizabeth River, where residents long had discussed seceding from Essex County. Slavery and states' rights had nothing to do with the secession sentiment in Elizabeth; local folk simply chafed under Essex domination. So, they broke away on March 18, 1857 (with legislative approval of course) and called their seceded county "Union."

Actually the Essex-Union schism was predominantly an Elizabeth-Newark division, since life in the two county regions pivoted on the sister cities which had grown up in rivalry for more than 175 years. The House of Essex just wasn't big enough to hold them both, particularly with slightly younger sister Newark taking most of the cake and leaving the crumbs for Elizabeth.

The divided house eventually benefitted both Union and Essex but in 1857 Union County thrived mainly on memories. Boundaries of the new county roughly coincided with the early boundaries of Elizabethtown, the first English-speaking settlement in New Jersey. Oddly enough, this first-settled land became the last of New Jersey's 21 counties to be established.

Why the Dutch never settled the region by the Achter Kol (Arthur Kill) is a mystery, since the Dutch knew good land when they saw it. New Englanders unsuccessfully negotiated with the Dutch for permission to settle near what is now Elizabeth in 1660; soon after Dutch guns drove off a party of 20 Long Islanders seeking to buy a plantation near the Raritan River.

ENGLISH guns had the final say in late August of 1664, however, when New Amsterdam (New York) capitulated to Colonel Richard Nicolls. Within a month three Long Islanders, John Bayly, Daniel Denton and Luke Watson, obtained Nicolls's permission to dicker with the Indians for a tract along the Achter Kol.

The Indians readily accepted the usual English offer of coats, gunpowder and miscellany, and in exchange deeded a plot of ground including all of present-day Union County and pieces of Essex, Middlesex Somerset and Morris counties. Settlement started in November, 1664, after Denton sold his share to John Baker and John Ogden, with Ogden and his five grown sons being a powerful addition to the original property holders.

Meanwhile, the Duke of York sat down in England on June 23, 1664, and gave a couple of court favorites, Lord John Berkeley and George Carteret, the land of Nova Caesaria (New Jersey). Governor Nicolls obviously had no knowledge of this gift when he permitted John Bayly and friends to bargain with the Indians.

Philip Carteret, cousin of George,

sailed from England to become Governor of Nova Caesaria, and his arrival on the Achter Kol on August 1, 1665, caused no particular joy among the few families already living there. The ship "Philip" anchored and the new 26-year-old Governor came ashore along with 30 immigrants, including 18 servants.

Philip tried to make the best of a difficult situation. He greeted the old settlers, and in a show of husbandry shouldered a hoe as he marched up from the wharf. At the same time he named the settlement "Elizabeth Town" in honor of cousin George Carteret's wife.

Robert Treat and his Connecticut associates founded Newark in the

Spring of 1666, but Elizabethtown moved into foremost prominence when Governor Carteret named the town capital of Jersey and summoned the state's first General Assembly there in 1668. Laws enacted by the Assembly covered everything from tippling in "taphouses" after 9 o'clock at night to putting witches to death. But, as one authority said, "Puritan austerity was so tempered by Dutch indifference that mercy itself could not have dictated a milder system."

Village fathers met on Divident Hill on May 20, 1668, to settle boundary differences between Newark and Elizabethtown, and in the Fall of that year little whaling vessels set out from the Elizabeth River. Soon Eliza-

bethtown tanners began to cure leather, and quickly the village became the center of the Colonial leather industry. Many leather enterprises in other colonies were started by Betsy-towners, including the first one in Newark. As early as 1678 Elizabethtown exported leather.

Farming occupied all male settlers, even those engaged in whaling or leather-making (and, in fact, the great number of cattle in the settlement led to the early leather curing). As demand for farm land increased, settlers pushed outward through the valley beneath heavily forested Watchung Mountain.

Farmers from Connecticut moved down to what is now Union in 1667 and established Connecticut Farms; in the 1680s Scotch families from Perth Amboy came overland and stopped in the fields on the plain south of the Watchungs—and their villages became known as Scotch Plains and Plainfield. Quakers from Woodbridge came to the Rahway (Rahway) River at about the same time. Then, in 1699, Elizabethtown settlers divided the pasturelands to the west—the West Fields, of course.

A FAMILY named Briant stopped in 1717 to farm the fields where springs gushed forth into the headwaters of the Rahway River. The village name? It just had to be Springfield! Isaac Sayre built his house in about 1710 on top of the plateau they later called Summit, and just to the west the preponderance of wild turkeys led new arrivals to call the area Turkey (now New Providence). If ever a region was settled easily and named naturally, it was Union County.

Yet trouble brewed and erupted through the area, because of the understandable feelings of early settlers that their purchase of the land directly from the Indians took precedence over arbitrary distribution of the region to English Proprietors. The Proprietors tried to collect quit-rents but the settlers stood firm—and ready to fight, even against royal authority.

Even as land troubles intensified, Elizabethtown moved into a position as the leading settlement in the state. The location of the original state capital in the town attracted men of substance and culture. Village life rotated about the Presbyterian and Episcopal churches, particularly after Rev. Jonathan Dickinson (Presbyterian) and Rev. Edward Vaughan (Episcopal) came to the village in 1709.

Mr. Dickinson and Mr. Vaughan had remarkably parallel careers, both coming to Elizabethtown at about the same time and both dying in October, 1747. Mr. Dickinson gained particular attention as a preacher, teacher, farmer and practising physician of note. He was an obvious choice to become the first president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) in

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This is the twentieth of a series of articles dealing with New Jersey's 21 counties, sketching their past and present with, now and then, a peek into their future. The counties will be considered in alphabetical order each week. Next Sunday: Warren County.



A lazy stream, the Rahway River flows through Cranford, once known as the "Venice of Jersey" because of its water carnivals.



Historic Springfield Presbyterian Church, on site of pitched battle between Americans and British during the Revolution.



Boxwood Hall on East Jersey street, Elizabeth, was the home of Elias Boudinot, first president of Continental Congress.



The Arthur Kill viewed from old ferry site at foot of Elizabeth avenue, Elizabethport, with Goethals Bridge in background.

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 Elizabethtown in 1747 (which did not prevent town residents from ward Newarkers).

RENT battles prepared the cov the King. In Feb bethtown resolut Staten Island be "have manifested sition towards th ica." Tory sent area nevertheless cially strong after can troops in th land in the Sum subsequent retr army across New

Despite the syn the crown, the Union County ha ers aplenty. Th Livingston, elect Jersey on Augu elected continuo office in 1790); Elizabethtown an signers of the Dec ence; Jonathon Washington's sta leader in Congre tinguished field Boudinot, outsta Continental Con dent of Congress peace tre

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Knyphausen troops at Conne back to Elizabet a pounding rain left the Farms th village. One of

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COUNTY

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in 1746. After his move to Newark in 1746, he couldn't make Elizabeth feel more loving to-

with the Proprietors' policy for opposition to the British. In February, 1775, an Elizabethan cut off trade with the British because the inhabitants had an unfriendly disposition. The liberties of American government pervaded the minds and became especially after the defeat of America at the Battle of Long Island in September of 1776 and the flight of Washington's army from Jersey that Fall. The sympathies of many for the British region which is now called Revolutionary lead-ers included William Livingston, Governor of New Jersey, who died in 1790 (and re-elected until he died in 1790). Abraham Clark of Rahway, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, an officer on the staff and subsequently a judge; Aaron Ogden, dis-tinguished officer; and Elias Boudinot, a member of the Continental Congress, who as presi-ent in 1783 signed the Treaty of Paris with Britain.

The Tories forced many patriots to take to the water often from Staten Island in 1779-80, making a damaging foray on the mainland, when Cornelius Hatfield sympathizers into the town and burned the court-neyan Church. Proof of the fact that Eliza-eth Cornelius Hatfield "opened the doors of the storehouse" as a tem-

made two desperate ef-forts to get the county to get troops quartered in June, 1780, but each time fighting and badly out-numbered turned back the

In 1780, General Knyp-er's army landed at Elizabeth and brilliantly uniformed for the Short Hills. He established 12 men at Elizabethtown, with the idea of delaying the march. The British doggedly while "Old Order" atop Beacon Hill called out the mili-tary Washington's bri-riestown.

He halted his mauled army at the Farms, then fell back to the town in the midst of a storm. As his troops moved they set the torch to the British soldiers

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Bayway refinery and re-search center of Standard Oil Company in Linden is one of world's largest re-fineries. Morse's Creek is stream in the foreground.



Elizabeth from the air. Building with swept-back tower in left center is the Union County Court House, flanked by Pennsylvania Railroad tracks and Broad street. Battin High School is in right foreground.

The Garden State Parkway (center) crossing at Route 82 (Morris avenue) and ap-proach to Route 22. Stream visible at right is West Branch of Elizabeth River.

Color photos by Tuttle.





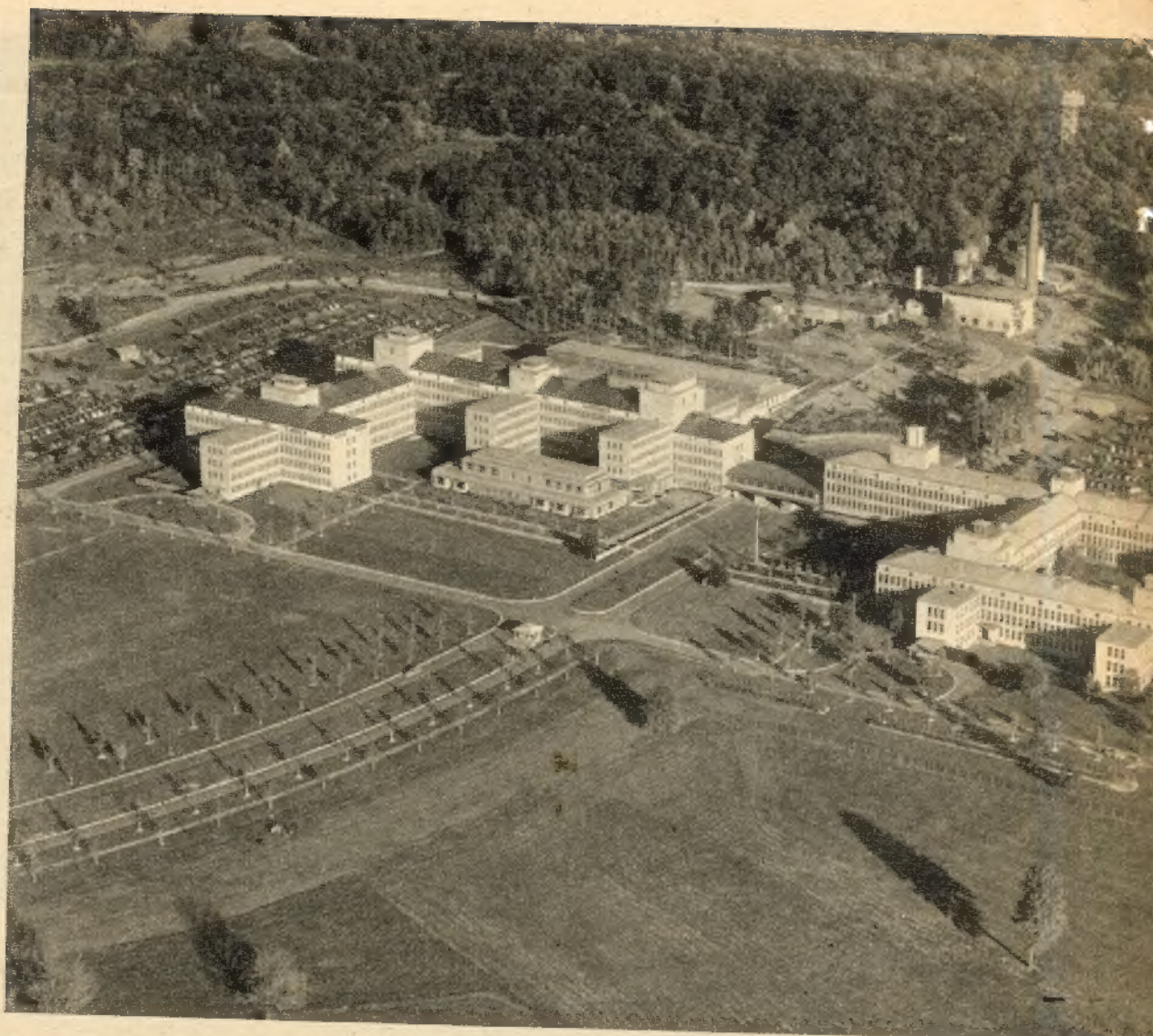
Front street in Plainfield, shopping center of the "Queen City," once famed for hat factories and clothes-making establishments.



Steepleless "Old First" dates back to 1668. The College of New Jersey (now Princeton) held its first class on this site in 1746.



Eucharistic lilies for bridal bouquets, largest planting under glass in U. S., at L. B. Coddington Co. nursery in Murray Hill.



UNION COUNTY

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shot through an open window to kill Mrs. James Caldwell, wife of Rev. Caldwell, "The Fighting Parson" (or, "The High Priest of the Revolution," as the British called him).

Sixteen days later 5,000 British troops again headed towards the Short Hills only to meet a militia savagely aroused by the burning of Connecticut Farms and the wanton murder of Mrs. Caldwell. Rev. Caldwell inspired the fighting Americans at Springfield, finally passing out Watts's hymnals for use as wadding in the defenders' guns. His ringing about, "Now give them Watts, boys!" has rolled down through the years.

English troops fell back from Watts and Springfield after this last battle of consequence on Jersey soil, and the nation moved toward peace. War's end meant disaster for many old Tory families, forced to leave their homeland for exile in Nova Scotia or New Brunswick, Canada. General Washington paid a brief visit to Elizabethtown's Boxwood Hall, the residence of Elias Boudinot, on April 30, 1789, while the general was on his way to New York to become president.

ESSEX COUNTY—including all of Union—had about 17,000 residents after the war, with Newark and Elizabeth almost of a size, each having a population of about 1,000. The towns vied for leadership, although the people of Elizabeth slowly became charged with envy on account of the increasing prosperity of Newark. Even Elizabethtown's long-standing leather industry gravitated to Newark.

The smoldering battle broke out into the open in February, 1807, when Essex County voted for the location of a new courthouse. Citizens of both

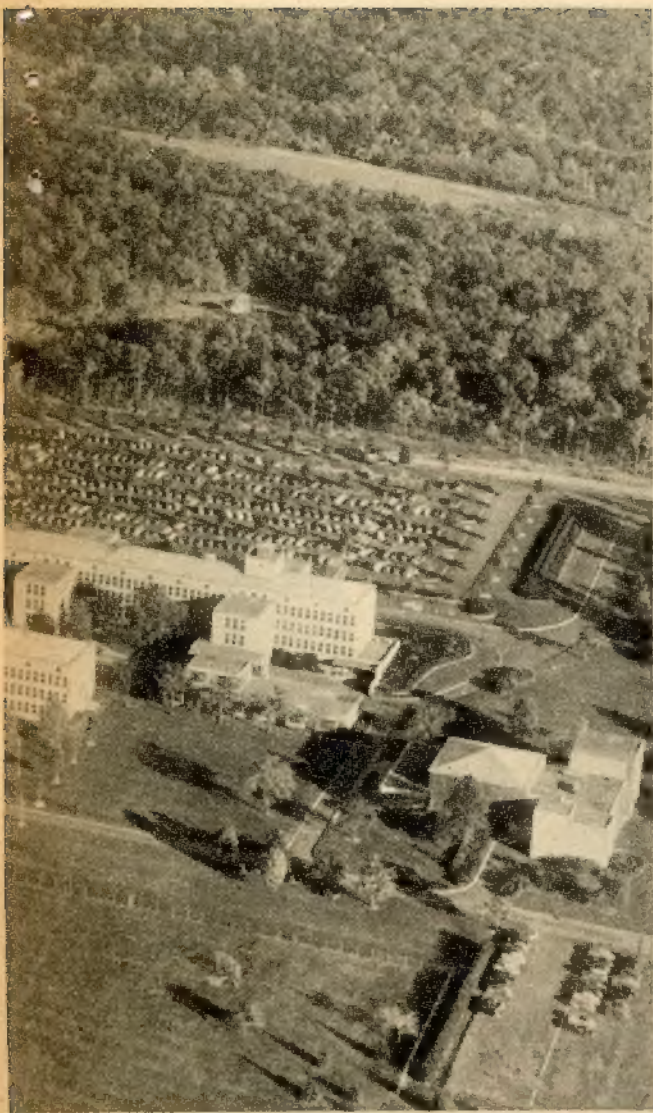
Elizabethtown and Newark voted often, if not wisely, with so many votes being cast that it was evident a glaring fraud had been perpetrated. Nevertheless Newark won the battle and got the new courthouse—but in her stubbornness, Elizabeth kept her old courthouse anyway!

A more personal battle involved John and Robert Livingston, Aaron Ogden and Thomas Gibbons, who fought for control of the waterfront, where ferries had been running to New York for a century. Ogden granted permission to the Livingstons to run the steamboat "Raritan" between Elizabeth Point and New York in 1808, then built his own steamboat in 1811. He ran afoul of a steamboat monopoly granted by the New York Legislature to the Livingstons. Protracted legal maneuvering finally ended in 1824 when the U. S. Supreme Court voided monopolistic steamboat practices and opened the waters to all comers.

THAT set the stage for the coming of the railroads in the 1830s (the New Jersey Railroad in 1834 and the Elizabethtown and Somerville in 1836). The routes of the twisting lines across the county's fields encouraged development of the pastureland surrounding Elizabethtown—although the development didn't exactly engulf the county.

Indeed, Union County had only about 25,000 residents when it became a separate county (compared with about 95,000 in Essex County). Union residents didn't care; they were so happy to be free that the Republicans and Democrats agreed to split county offices equally, a spirit of harmony which hasn't prevailed since.

Industry of a widely varied sort came to the region in the first half



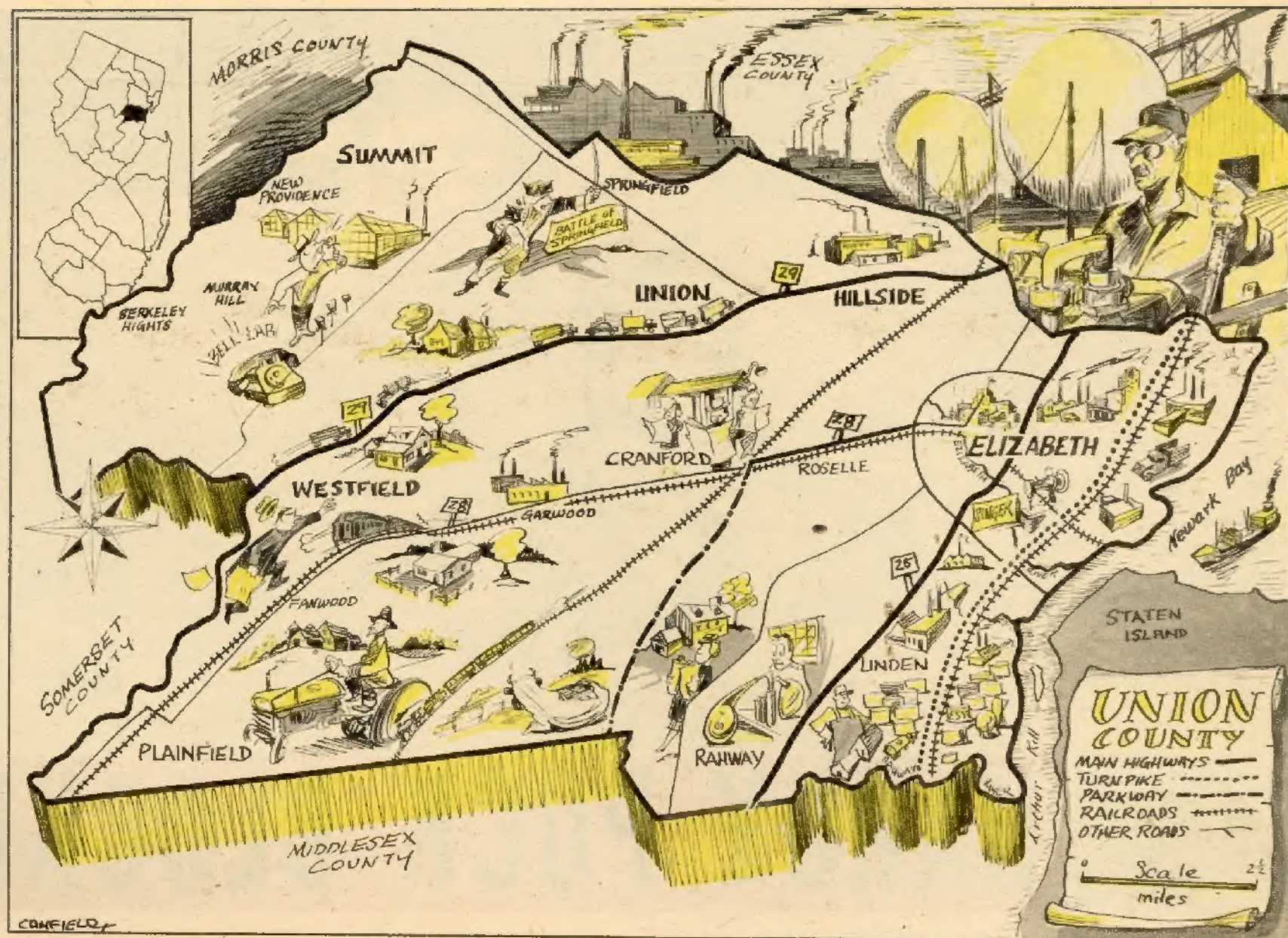
The huge Bell Telephone laboratories in Murray Hill is typical of continuing industrial decentralization trend.

of the 19th Century. Plainfield, for example, found prosperity from the many hat factories and clothes-making establishments started in the first years of the 19th Century. Rahway had 12 carriage factories in the 1830s and became famed as a center of fine carriages until the Civil War ruined its Southern trade.

Elizabethport was spoken of in 1844 as a "new and thriving place" because of its railroad connections. Elizabethtown boasted a population somewhat in excess of 5,000 in 1857 and had a few small machine manufacturers. Many Union County towns had paper mills in the 1840s, most of them concentrated in Springfield.

ON the south slope of Watchung Mountain, David Felt came in 1845 to buy the old mill Peter Willcoxie had built on Blue Brook a century before. Felt, a New York printer and stationer, conceived the notion of a self-contained manufacturing village. He built homes, a school, a church and a country store. Things went along well until the Civil War, when markets collapsed and Feltville became a deserted village (Feltville still exists as "The Deserted Village" in Watchung Reservation).

Easily the most significant industrial happening in all Union County history took place in 1873, when the Singer Manufacturing Company consolidated its several separated sewing machine manufacturing plants into one plant in Elizabethport. Singer put \$3,000,000 into a 32-acre plant employing 3,000 workers. Few industries in the nation exceeded the plant in size. Singer's success focused attention on the wide open Union County meadows land available for big industry.



Union, last of Jersey's counties to be established, is the second smallest in size with 104 square miles.

Industrial development also hastened growth of residential towns along the railroads. The beautifully shaded streets of Westfield, Plainfield and Scotch Plains attracted settlers, many of them men of wealth. The Jersey Central Railroad itself started to develop Fanwood in 1867 and in 1878 a luxurious Summer hotel was built at Netherwood at a cost of \$175,000.

In the mountains, the Lackawanna Railroad snaked over from Essex County to Summit in 1837 and by the 1880s made the town easily accessible to moneyed commuters and equally well-off Summer visitors. A branch railroad rolled out through New Providence and Berkeley Heights to link that region with the cities.

STRANGELY enough, in view of the excellent railroad connections, the land south of Elizabeth developed slowly. As late as 1890 Linden was an area of truck farms, while Rahway's carriage factories still topped industries in that town. Suddenly, however, within two decades the entire section burst forth into industrial prominence and Union County's industrial die was cast.

Among the first to found an important industry in the area was J. Noah H. Slee, who developed his Three-in-One Oil in a Rahway shack and sold his first three dozen bottles there in 1894. George Merck purchased 150 acres of land on the Rahway-Linden boundary line in 1900 and by 1903 had completed construction of a three-story brick building, forerunner of today's tremendous Merck chemical and drug manufactory. Soon after, the Wheatena Co. started to make cereals in Rahway.

At the same time Standard Oil Co., seeking to escape the congested condi-

tions hemming in its refineries in Bayonne and Jersey City, built a pumping station in Linden and on January 2, 1909, the first battery of Linden stills was fired. Since then the Bayway Refinery has grown into one of the world's largest refineries.

INDUSTRY has spread throughout Union County from those beginnings—to Garwood, Clark, Plainfield, Hillside, Kenilworth, and to many new locations in Elizabeth, Linden and Rahway—until today Union is the third most important industrial county in the state, despite the fact that it is the second smallest county in land area in New Jersey.

The last two decades have seen an influx of modern research laboratories and equally-modern production plants. Excellent examples are the Ciba Pharmaceutical Co. plant in Summit, Bell Telephone Laboratories at Murray Hill and the General Motors assembly plant at Linden. There are more, many more, as the postwar trend toward industrial decentralization continues.

In fact, a recent report of the Regional Plan Association, covering the five-year period ending in 1951, showed Union County led all metropolitan area counties in number of new plants from 1946 to 1951. The report showed Union gained 277 new plants in the period, with a construction value of \$25,563,000.

This tremendous industrial growth since 1900 has jumped Union County's population from 99,353 in 1900 to 398,138 in 1950. Real estate booms have struck various parts of the county, with Hillside and Union being notable illustrations of what has happened to particular locales in the past 30 years.

Hillside and Union parted ways as a joint township in 1913, with each of their rural towns taking about half the total population of 3,500. Ten years later Union had about 4,000 population, Hillside about 5,000. Then the real estate men started to cut up the farmlands into small home plots. Today finds Union with a population of about 40,000, and Hillside with a population of about 22,000.

Surprisingly enough, despite Union's recognized industrial prominence and its noted residential towns, the county has an agricultural income of well over \$4,000,000 annually. Moreover, Union leads all New Jersey counties in value of nursery and greenhouse products, with the county's annual income of \$2,500,000 from that source topping second-place Morris County by about \$800,000.

THE rapid growth has wiped out many of the old landmarks of Union County, with oldtime Elizabeth particularly buried under modern advances. Although little islands of antiquity linger, this oldest part of the House of Essex has been almost completely revamped.

Still four years shy of being officially a century old, Union County retains its memories—and certainly still has a future. Statistics alone can't tell a story, but Union County has soared in 96 years from one of the county's lesser-populated areas to the fourth highest in state population. Above all, Union has its pride—something the folks felt they had lost to Newark before 1857.

Thus the house divided didn't fall. The sisters who went their separate ways both grew and prospered, and they're much friendlier than they were in 1857.